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AM-GARRISON SKED 1-18
BY JOHN MILNE
WASHINGTON (UPI) -- THE FBI TRIED TO STAY CLEAR OF THE KENNEDY ASSASSINATION PROBE LAUNCHED BY CONSPIRACY-MINDED DISTRICT ATTORNEY JIM GARRISON, BUT IT KEPT TABS ON GARRISON'S INFORMANTS AND HIS PROBES OF HOMOSEXUALS, RECORDS SHOWED WEDNESDAY.
THE AGENCY'S FILES ALSO SHOW THAT ONE TOP FBI OFFICIAL CONCLUDED MANY OF GARRISON'S CONSPIRACY COHORTS WERE "MENTAL CASES, DOPE ADDICTS" AND CRIMINALS, AND THAT GARRISON HIMSELF MIGHT BE INSANE.
BUT THE AGENCY WAS SO FEARFUL IT WOULD BE ACCUSED OF TRYING TO DISCREDIT THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY IT DECIDED NOT TO INVESTIGATE A REPORT THAT HE WAS SHAKING DOWN "HUNDREDS OF SEX DEVIATES" IN NEW ORLEAN'S FRENCH QUARTER.
AND HOOVER DECIDED NOT TO INTERVIEW FORMER FBI EMPLOYEES IN NEW ORLEANS ABOUT A PRE-ASSASSINATION WARNING THAT THE BUREAU THERE ALLEGEDLY RECEIVED BECAUSE WORD MIGHT LEAK BACK TO GARRISON.
GARRISON, CHIEF LOCAL PROSECUTOR IN NEW ORLEANS, BECAME A WELL KNOWN CONSPIRACY THEORIST AFTER ANNOUNCING IN FEBRUARY 1967 HE THOUGHT JOHN KENNEDY WAS KILLED BY A GROUP INCLUDING LEE HARVEY OSWALD.
THE CONCLUSION DID NOT SET WELL WITH FBI DIRECTOR J. EDGAR HOOVER, WHO TOLD HIS AGENTS IN A FEB. 24 MEMO THAT, "DUE TO GARRISON'S IRRESPONSIBLE ACTIONS IN CONNECTION WITH THIS MATTER, NO CONTACT IS BEING MADE WITH HIM OR ANY MEMBER OF HIS STAFF."
DESPITE HOOVER'S DESIRE TO KEEP OUT OF GARRISON'S PROBES, FBI RECORDS SHOW THE AGENCY BUILT FILES ON THE MEN GARRISON ACCUSED OF CONSPIRACY AND THAT IT RECEIVED "VOLUMINOUS INFORMATION CONCERNING SPECULATION AND RUMORS" ON THE ASSASSINATION AS A RESULT OF HIS ACTIVITIES.
THE AGENCY MEANTIME WAS PRIVATELY KEEPING TRACK OF GARRISON'S WORK, INCLUDING HIS SEARCH FOR INFORMATION AMONG NEW ORLEANS HOMOSEXUALS.
A MARCH 1967 MEMO QUOTED AN INFORMANT SAYING GARRISON TOLD ONE FRENCH QUARTER NIGHTCLUB OPERATOR HE COULD EXHIBIT FEMALE IMPERSONATORS IF HE PROVIDED INFORMATION ON SPECIFIC HOMOSEXUALS.
THE MEMO SAID THE DEAL FELL THROUGH BECAUSE THE BAR OWNER HAD NO INFORMATION GARRISON WANTED.
IN ANOTHER MEMO, JUSTICE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL H.L. EDWARDS QUOTED A RELIABLE SOURCE SAYING THAT GARRISON WAS INVOLVED IN A RACKET "WHEREIN HE AND A COUPLE OF OTHERS ARE SHAKING DOWN HUNDREDS OF SEX DEVIATES IN THE NEW ORLEANS FRENCH QUARTER."
EDWARDS SAID HIS SOURCE REPORTED GARRISON DEMANDED MONEY AND PROMISED IN RETURN THAT VICE CHARGES WOULD BE REDUCED OR DROPPED.
THE FILES SHOW HOOVER DECIDED NOT TO LOOK INTO THE MATTER, AS IT MIGHT APPEAR THE FBI WAS TRYING TO DISCREDIT THE MAN WHO STIRRED UP SO MUCH CONTROVERSY.
IN ANOTHER INCIDENT, THE FILES SHOW HOOVER DECIDED IN THE LATE 1960S NOT TO QUESTION FORMER FBI EMPLOYEES IN NEW ORLEANS ABOUT A MEMO A CLERK THERE SAID HE GOT JUST PRIOR TO THE ASSASSINATION.
THE CLERK, WILLIAM S. WALTER, SAID A MEMO FROM FBI HEADQUARTERS HAD COME OVER THE INTER-BUREAU TELETYPE WARNING THAT AN ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT COULD TAKE PLACE IN DALLAS.
FBI HEADQUARTERS SAID NO SUCH MEMO EVER WAS SENT, AND HOOVER SAID LARGE-SCALE INTERVIEWS ON THE SUBJECT COULD LEAD GARRISON TO CHARGE THAT THE FBI WAS TRYING TO INTIMIDATE WALTERS.
BY 1968, THE FILES SHOW, W.A. BRANIGAN, A TOP HOOVER ASSISTANT, HAD CONCLUDED GARRISON'S CONSPIRACY THEORY WAS "ABSOLUTELY UNWORTHY OF BELIEF AND STRONGLY SUGGESTS THAT GARRISON IS INSANE."
BRANIGAN, DISCUSSING GARRISON'S UNSUCCESSUL ATTEMPT TO PROVE IN COURT THAT NEW ORLEANS BUSINESSMAN CLAY SHAW CONSPIRED TO KILL KENNEDY, NOTED THAT ONE OF THE WITNESSES AGAINST SHAW HAD BEEN COMMITTED TO A MENTAL INSTITUTION.
"PRACTICALLY ALL OF GARRISON'S WITNESSES HAVE BEEN MENTAL CASES, DOPE ADDICTS, CRIMINALS WITH UNSAVORY BACKGROUNDS AND THE LIKE," BRANIGAN SAID.
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